



Edited by

Denis Hyams-Ssekasi · Elizabeth F. Caldwell

Experiential Learning for Entrepreneurship

Theoretical and
Practical Perspectives
on Enterprise Education

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Foreword

Can entrepreneurship really be taught? This question has been put to me throughout my career and, for the first 20 years, my instinctive answer would have been ‘yes’—after all that is what I did as a professor in a business school. However, I then decided to launch my own business and soon discovered that nothing can really prepare you for the hard work and stress caused by the roller-coaster of emotional ups and downs—whether your business is successful or not. I knew I was not a risk-taker, but I had not anticipated the emotional strain this puts you under when you depend for your livelihood on the work coming in for you and your team. Retreating back into academia, I have had the last 20 years to reflect on my experiences and write about them.

Let us start by asking whether education can influence your entrepreneurial tendency. Some entrepreneurs get ‘pushed’ into it by external circumstances, while others are ‘pulled’ by its attractions. Psychologists would say that there are five character traits or personality dimensions that measure this: a high need for achievement; a high internal locus of control; a need for independence; an acceptance of uncertainty and willingness to take measured risks; and creativity, innovation and opportunism (Burns 2018). These traits are influenced by who you are as well as your life experiences—entrepreneurs are born *and* made—and some traits, like the first three, are hard to influence through education. But the last two can be influenced.

There are techniques for mitigating and managing risk and the whole process of developing a business model and plan is designed to facilitate this and, in doing so, create more confidence in an uncertain future. I will never forget the MBA student who had a start-up dream and went around clutching the latest version of his business plan, almost like a comfort blanket—he went on to set up an airline. It is about giving entrepreneurs thinking tools to address uncertain, changing circumstances—frameworks to help develop strategies that address the different challenges they will face. However, entrepreneurship is a contact sport and the contact is with customers and competitors, so whilst entrepreneurs, like any athlete, might benefit from coaching—learning from the success and failure of others—just teaching strategy and tactics is not enough. Ultimately you have to try them out in your business, which is the basis of the ‘lean start-up’ approach of launching a product/service in a minimum viable state and learning from the feedback of customers (Reis 2011). This is pure experiential learning and it is why mentoring during start-up is such a powerful educational tool. I wish I had a pound for every excellent business plan produced by an MBA student with absolutely no intention of starting their own business. As I discovered with my business, knowing what to do is far easier than actually doing it.

Creativity—in particular the ability to spot innovative business opportunities—is probably the most important entrepreneurial characteristic. It also can be influenced through education and training. For example, a six-year study of more than 3000 US CEOs, contrasting 25 well-known entrepreneurs (such as Steve Jobs of Apple, Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Pierre Omidyar of eBay, Peter Thiel of PayPal, Niklas Zennström of Skype and Michael Dell) with other CEOs who had no track record for innovation, highlighted five discovery skills: networking, observing, questioning, associating, experimenting (Dyer et al. 2009). These skills can all be taught but also need to be practised. One skill in particular—‘associating’—can be difficult to master. Associating a solution to a problem in one context to another unsolved problem so as to create an innovative product/service that customers are willing to pay for requires a truly creative leap, for example, when Henry Ford

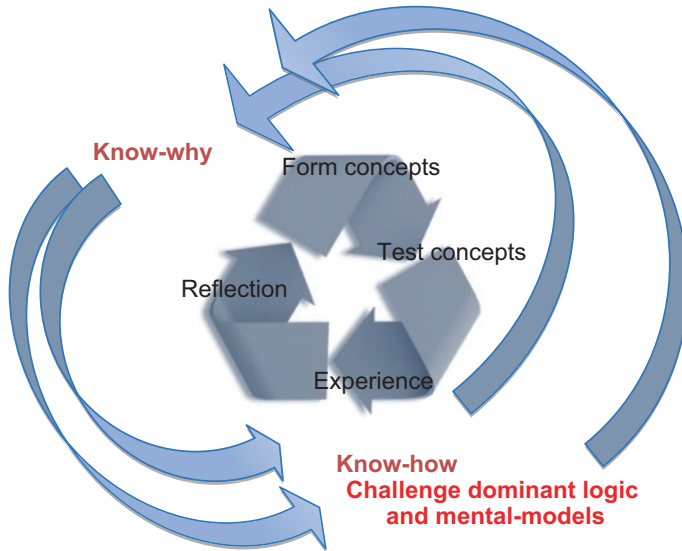


Fig. 1 The wheel of learning. (Adapted from Burns 2016; Kim 1993)

‘associated’ the production line he ‘observed’ in a slaughterhouse with his vision of building an affordable car for the masses. Another skill—‘questioning’—goes to the heart of innovation in products and services and their marketing. It is also at the heart of effective experiential learning.

Experiential learning is probably the most powerful form of learning. We learn most things in life—eating, crawling, walking and communicating—through trial and error: action, consequence, reflection and then remedial action. Building on Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (1984), Kim (1993) suggested that effective learning can be considered to be a revolving wheel—the wheel of learning (Fig. 1). During the first half of the cycle, you form and then test existing concepts and observe what happens through experience—learning ‘know-how’. In the second half of the cycle, you are reflecting on the observations and forming new concepts—learning ‘know-why’—often called ‘double-loop learning’ (Argyris and Schön 1978). It is this second sort of learning that is of particular value to entrepreneurs because it is at this point that root causes of problems

are diagnosed and systematic solutions put in place. This is when you question your ‘dominant logic’ or ‘mental models’—the assumptions and theories about the world upon which your learning is based. Dominant logic is the mind-set with which an organisation or industry collectively sees itself and the world it inhabits—its position with customers, competitors and other stakeholders. It filters the information, subconsciously interpreting environmental data in a certain way and influences behaviour. If you start asking ‘why?’ and ‘why not?’ and questioning industry’s dominant logic, you start to reframe your thinking and become more creative and innovative, able to spot opportunities for new products or markets that others have failed to see.

So, can entrepreneurship be taught? I believe entrepreneurs are, in part, born and, in part, made—shaped through their life experiences, including education. Whilst there is no blueprint for success, we can help them ‘play the odds’ by showing which strategies have the best chances of success, giving them the confidence to address the unexpected challenges they will face. But that education must include ‘doing’—experimenting, testing concepts and learning from experience. Experiential learning is not just about developing knowledge and skills. It is about giving entrepreneurs thinking tools and frameworks to address changing circumstances—not rigid rules to adhere to—allowing them to try them out in different situations. Not only does it facilitate learning and better embed it in the individual, it improves judgement and individual confidence. By incorporating it into the teaching of entrepreneurship, educators can improve entrepreneurs’ creativity and chances of success. At the heart of experiential learning lie those all important questions: ‘why?’ and ‘why not?’

Experiential learning is a powerful tool and this book is an important part of the enterprise educators’ toolkit. It not only explains the theoretical underpinning for experiential learning but also outlines the many ways it can be used in the teaching, learning and assessment of entrepreneurship courses. It is particularly useful in showing how it can be used out of the classroom and its pivotal role in building a learning organisation, where the constant turning of the wheel of learning, sharing knowledge of know-how and know-why, embeds double-loop learning within it and generates organisational learning. It demonstrates how, both for

the individual and the larger organisation, experiential learning is at the core of entrepreneurship, creating a self-sustaining entrepreneurial mindset that constantly learns from the experiences of the market place.

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Preface

In their study Fayolle et al. (2006) define entrepreneurship education as a “process of education for entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, which involves developing certain personal qualities” (p. 702). The European Commission (2003) associates entrepreneurship education with learning opportunities that enables one to be creative and to convert an idea into reality. Similarly, the QAA (2012) views entrepreneurship education as a means of developing an entrepreneurial mind-set and techniques in terms of becoming self-employed and/or starting one’s own business. Advocates for entrepreneurship education note that it can increase students’ interest in entrepreneurship and influence aspirations to become entrepreneurs (Dickson et al. 2008; Fayolle et al. 2006; Stokes et al. 2010). According to Csorba (2014), entrepreneurship education helps students who are keen to become entrepreneurs to acquire hands-on experience whilst studying, increase their personal networks, enhance their academic success and boost self-confidence levels. Vestergaard et al. (2012) found that alumni students who undertook entrepreneurship education and training not only started their own businesses but earned a higher wage as compared to those who did not.

The delivery of entrepreneurship education in higher education establishments is not new and Katz (2003) points out that at least 120,000 students took part in this education 50 years ago. However, since then, interest in increasing the supply of future entrepreneurs has grown and in

fact has been argued by Burns (2016, p. 7) to be “probably one of the major challenges facing business schools in the 21st century”. Consensus has been reached by many educators that it is not enough to teach students about entrepreneurship but that students must experience entrepreneurship through carrying out aspects of developing and running a business in order to develop their entrepreneurial skills (see Cope 2005; Politis 2005).

This idea of learning entrepreneurship by actually starting and running a business aligns with the concept of experiential learning, also known as ‘learning by doing’, which posits that an infusion of direct experiences is necessary for learning to take place (Kolb and Kolb 2005). The goal of successful entrepreneurship education is to learn the fundamental concepts of business as well as to develop the ability to apply them flexibly in multiple situations. Indeed, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle provides one mechanism through which to do this. The cycle involves learners reflecting on experiences, extracting and conceptualising the learning from that experience, followed by experimenting, testing and honing the new insights through further experiences.

These principles of experiential learning have been adopted widely in a variety of disciplines in higher education where graduates must acquire practical competence as well as theoretical knowledge during their studies, such as in nursing, counselling and teacher education (Clark et al. 2010). Experiential learning is also widely used for training programmes outside of formal educational settings, for example, in the retail and service sectors. Such programmes, both inside and outside of education, often involve simulating experiences through games and role-play or supervising trainees on work placements. However in recent years, educators have set themselves the challenge of trying to provide students with the experience of starting a live business venture, in the real world. In order to do this, many of the most innovative educators have utilised experiential learning theory in designing their entrepreneurship programmes. These educational experiences all involve students ‘doing’ aspects of business and range from developing business plans to full venture creation programmes where students launch and run a live business. Entrepreneurship education, therefore, not only incorporates some of the most innovative and immersive educational experiences but also serves as an opportunity to extend and develop our understanding of experiential

learning, by incorporating into it concepts of challenge-led and emotion-based learning.

It is this shift to designing entrepreneurship programmes which incorporate experiential learning that is the key focus of this book. In particular, the book addresses the following key questions: How can practical business experiences be incorporated into programmes and courses? How should experiential learning be assessed? What role can technology and virtual learning experiences play in entrepreneurship education? How do we conceptualise, capture and develop the experiential learning that occurs outside of formal educational institutions, in the 'real world' of business?

We have divided the book into two parts, which examine in turn approaches to experiential learning for entrepreneurship from both within educational establishments and organisations outside of education. In Part I, the chapters cover key aspects and experiences of designing learning opportunities for entrepreneurship within education. In Chap. 1, Ramsgaard gives an overview of theoretical perspectives on experiential learning in entrepreneurship. In Chap. 2, Lackéus and Williams Middleton review their extensive experience designing and conducting assessment in programmes that utilise experiential learning. Yasin and Hafeez (Chap. 3) then outline the use of technology-based simulation gaming as potent tool used to enhance experiential learning in entrepreneurship studies. Following these chapters are four practical case studies examining different aspects of embedding and running entrepreneurial activities in educational institutions. The first case study concerns embedding a live business experience into an existing entrepreneurship course structure (Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell, Chap. 4). This is followed by two case studies that examine different aspects of running challenged entrepreneurial activities: raising aspirations of schoolchildren (Scott, Mackie, Smith and Crooks, Chap. 5) and fostering interdisciplinary working among university students (Power, Chap. 6). The final chapter in this part explores the interaction between entrepreneurial activities and the institutional context (Scuotto and Murray, Chap. 7).

Part II consists of six chapters which examine experiential learning in entrepreneurial environments around the world. Estrada-Robles (Chap. 8) offers a detailed study of experiential learning in entrepreneurial families in Mexico and shows how the entrepreneurial family becomes a

learning space that allows an exploration and exploitation of business opportunities. In Chap. 9, Bamber and Gransden discuss how reflection, a key component of the experiential cycle, can be incorporated into staff meetings to enhance service in premium dining restaurants. Calisto (Chap. 10) discusses the way ‘intrapreneurs’, or entrepreneurial individuals who work in large organisations, recognise and act on opportunities. In Chap. 11, Bamber and Harding present a matrix for taking a planned approach to developing organisational values through experiential learning workshops. The final two chapters in this part examine schemes aimed at supporting new entrepreneurs. Dobson, Maas, Jones and Lockyer explore the role of an incubator in developing business ideas in Ghana (Chap. 12). Following this, the work of Penney, Bibikas, Vorley and Wapshott (Chap. 13) reflects on a pan-European project to develop young entrepreneurs in the information and communication technology sector.

Finally, we owe thanks to many people who have enabled this book to come to fruition. Firstly we would like to thank the contributors for taking the time to write their chapters. We are also grateful to Dr Jamie Halsall who has been an invaluable source of inspiration and gave us the impetus and encouragement to begin on the journey of compiling this volume. We would also like to thank Liz Barlow and Lucy Kidwell at Palgrave for their support at every stage of the book and R. Shruthi Krishna and the production team at Springer for their dedicated work during the production process.

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Part I

Experiential Learning in Education



1

Experiential Learning Philosophies of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education

Michael Breum Ramsgaard

Introduction

How can educators in entrepreneurship education apply an experiential learning perspective in their curriculum design and course planning? Hannon (2005) suggested using the notions on teaching *about*, *for*, and *through* when developing and researching entrepreneurship education. However, other notions and overall understandings may provide us with new perspectives that can advance the field by taking into consideration other elements—for example, *in*, *after*, *under*, *over*, *beside*, *during*, and *meanwhile* (Naia et al. 2015; Neergaard et al. 2016; Ramsgaard and Christensen 2016) or *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* (Pittaway and Cope 2007a; Rasmussen and Sørheim 2006).

The current conceptual chapter proposes that research in entrepreneurship education has developed a narrow perspective on learning if its focus relies only on *about*, *for*, and *through*. The chapter explores other points of view and furthermore discusses and explores central topics

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within experiential learning using the lenses of both educators and students. Research on entrepreneurship education and especially experiential learning has long pursued questions of how to apply the pedagogies and didactics of experiential learning into curriculum development and course planning (Krueger 2007; Pittaway and Cope 2007b), but the educator's own ability to differentiate and experiment with known learning approaches has been a highly overlooked topic.

The point of departure for the chapter will be Hannon's work on philosophies of entrepreneurship education (Hannon 2005, 2006) combined with Jason Cope's dynamic perspective on experiential learning (Cope 2003, 2005; Cope and Watts 2000; Pittaway and Cope 2007a; Pittaway and Thorpe 2012) and will further discuss in relation to lenses of transformative learning, entrepreneurial action, entrepreneurial reflection, and entrepreneurial identity in order to leverage an understanding of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education on a conceptual basis. Finally, the chapter will suggest a dynamic model that educators can use to design experiential learning activities that include an interplay of various models and understandings.

The chapter proposes that a narrow perspective on learning has been created in research in entrepreneurship education that focuses only on teaching *about*, *for*, and *through*. The purpose of this chapter is to present and further develop experiential learning philosophies of enterprise and entrepreneurship education.

Conceptual Background

Within theories on entrepreneurial learning, evidence suggests that experiential learning methods and approaches can enhance learning outcomes for students in higher education (Middleton et al. 2014; Neergaard et al. 2016). Hannon's contribution to entrepreneurship education with the concept of *about*, *for*, and *through* entrepreneurship education has received widespread recognition (Bridge 2017). However, current debates in learning theory address developments in the conceptualization of learning processes from both educators and students (Moon 2004), and recent research on Hannon's taxonomy suggests that the concept requires an update (Hoppe et al. 2017).